The Black Cat

OCTOBER 1912

The Stories in this issue were chosen by four sportsmen camping in the heart of the Maine woods seated around a crackling log-fire with pipes aglow. They are eight smashing good stories guaranteed to lift you out of the turmoil of politics and the "high-cost-of-living" into a world of adventure and mystery. Clean, vigorous stories — every one of them. And if the scream of the reel and the glorious flash of a fighting salmon are pleasant memories to you, this number of The Black Cat is particularly yours. Go to it.

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The Nail.*

BY STEPHEN CHALMERS.

WHETHER there were any other survivors, Hammil did not know. Neither did he care much. He was only half alive himself, and too tired to think.

The island—he supposed it was an island—was a dreary prospect. A gray sea lashed a rocky shore. Above the wave-washed rim, it arose in a quiet slope toward a central hill. Sparse woods thickened toward the peak.

It was raining; the dripping trees swayed dismally against a leaden sky; and Hammil was never so miserable in his life.

Toward noon the after-winds of the fatal hurricane abated. The overhead cloud-mass broke into great racing clots, between two of which the sun cast a wet ray.

Then Hammil felt better, and the island looked more prepossessing. Having rested, he went to look for human company.

He found none, but enough miscellaneous wreck and merchandise to assure him that he would not starve, at least. With a little ingenuity, also, he could build himself a shack and furnish it with the saloon fixtures of an ill-fated passenger cruiser.

For the rest, although the lonely island was apparently an uninhabited speck out of the regular course of marine traffic, he would no doubt be picked up sooner or later by a searching

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steamer. For there were fifteen hundred lives to be accounted for.

Seventeen survivors, including Hammil, were picked up later, some on an islet fifty miles to the east, some on a little cay to the south, and Hammil singly on his own island.

But that is not the story.

As soon as the castaway knew that he was alone, he let possible rescue rest with chance and proceeded as if he were destined to spend the rest of his days on the island.

In the nights, Thought was his enemy. In the days, Action was his friend. He built himself a rough shack and stocked it with all the preserved food and useful merchandise washed ashore. He worked so hard that when the dreaded darkness came even Thought found its machine too exhausted for torturing service. Then sleep was a kind of nine-hours' oblivion.

Sometimes he climbed the hill and scanned the encircling horizon, but as nothing rewarded his eyes, and the blank sea stirred thoughts unpleasant, he gave up scanning and applied himself more industriously than before.

His trouble began when the essential things were accomplished. He had a house and plenty to eat and drink—even wines. He could have lived in idleness for two years, at least.

But there was no joy in the thought. As soon as he ceased to work he found himself gazing at the horizon and yearning for the modern haunts of his fellows. Also he found it more difficult to sleep at night.

Then came the third stage—the ultimate adaptation of man to conditions.

Hammil saw that without employment all roads led to madness. He devised a hook and line and fished. He made a bow and arrows and shot wild pigeons at dawn and dusk. He studied the resources of his island, found they were not a few, and made plans to utilize them.

Had he had a mate—preferably a woman—he would have been comparatively contented.

At the end of four weeks he had all but forgotten the possible arrival of a searching steamer. In fact, one morning after a swim in the clear sunny waters of a cove, he caught himself half-wishing that the steamer would stay away and leave him in the peace which he had developed within himself.

Then the trivial thing happened.

Late one afternoon he was in the woods on a still hunt for wild pigeons. Deciding that the hour was too early for the dusk-settling

of the birds, he sat on a rock at the base of a tree and prepared to smoke a pipe. He had an unlimited supply of canned tobacco and a whole case of patent electric pocket-lighters.

He sought an object against which to knock out the old dottle of his pipe, and chose the trunk of the tree. He raised the pipe to tap out its contents and—stopped!

For a full minute he stared at the thing which had arrested his action. Slowly its significance dawned upon him. His whole being thrilled with joy, fear, excitement.

The thing was a plain two-inch nail, driven half its length into the trunk of the tree, about five feet from the ground.

The exposed head was rusty, but—it was a nail! It was a thing manufactured by a man. A man had driven it into this tree. *Ergo*, there was, or had been, another man on the island.

Hammil stared at the thing. The pipe hung unlighted between his fingers, and he had dropped the electric lighter to the ground.

Upon the instant the peace which had crept into his life was destroyed. At sight of that nail he was again the creature of civilization. The little steel thing jutting from the tree was as a god, and his every sense worshipped what it stood for.

A nail—in the middle of a wood on a lost speck of an island somewhere in the great sea wilderness!

How did it get there? Why was it driven in this particular tree? For what purpose in any tree?

One thing was certain. A man had driven it and for some reason. Therefore there were probably other relics of that man's passage. All Hammil had to do was to find them.

Strange that he had seen none. Staggeringly strange that, if there were any, the first he should come upon should be the visible portion of a two-inch nail driven in one of thousands of trees.

By and by he ignited his tobacco and smoked. But soon the pipe was out and Hammil was squatting on the ground, staring blankly at the nail. His brain was in a riot.

The dusk thickened. It was only when darkness came and he could no longer see the nail, that Hammil awoke from his reverie.

Then he set a mark that would identify that particular tree and returned to his shack. He did not sleep at all that night.

At daybreak he was again standing before the tree. Later, as the sun struck through the timber and warmed his shoulder-blades, he pulled himself together, realizing that for one hour he had been gaping at the nail without being conscious of the passage of time.

He had hypnotized himself into a kind of trance. He knew that it

would be unwise to allow this phenomenon to occur again.

Hammil lit his pipe and held council with himself. It was broad daylight—a clear, sunny morning. The first shock and the surprise of the discovery were past. Now it was time to apply reason to the presence of that nail.

In the first place, how did the nail get there?

Half an hour later he sprang to his feet with a curse. Once more he had come to his senses, to find himself staring at the little round head of the object sticking out of the tree.

He resolutely turned his back on the nail and went to the shack. When he had cooked and eaten breakfast, he felt for his pipe. It was missing. He had last had it—?

He went back to the tree, wondering as he did so why his heart beat so rapidly and his feet went so willingly.

Then he became frightened. That little but highly significant nail was exercising an influence over him. When he found the pipe he wanted to sit down and stare at the thing again. Fear repelled him, while the nail drew him.

Fear won. He had learned a lesson. This time he smoked and reasoned in the shack. He thought of the incident of Robinson Crusoe and the footprint in the sand, and Crusoe's terror at the discovery. But Crusoe had found his man—Friday. So the terror of the footprint was laid.

This nail was worse than a footprint. If there had been a footprint to go with it, or even a stray hammer-head, or anything connecting it with the flesh and blood that had placed the nail where it was, he would have dismissed and forgotten the matter as trivial.

"I never understood the terror of that footprint before," he mused. "If Crusoe hadn't found the answer he would have gone mad—probably."

For himself, Hammil decided that if he could not find the man who had driven that nail, he must at least discover *why* he had driven it.

No doubt there were other relics of a former human inhabitant. In his first survey he had overlooked them, simply because he had decided on the very first day that no one had ever before set foot on that island.

Much relieved in his mind, Hammil began a re-examination of the island. Its shore line was four miles around. He first followed the coast back to his starting-point. He found no sign of his predecessor. Then he made an inner circle through the woods about two hundred yards from the shore. Again he found nothing.

At the end of the first day's search he found himself standing before the nail. It was near dusk. A wild pigeon whirred past his head. The man started violently and took to his heels. When he reached the shack he gave way to an attack of "nerves."

Next day he resumed his exploration, traveling in closing circles toward the central hill. Day after day he vainly pursued the examination. At the end of a week he walked slowly around a rock, his eyes studying the ground. Then he climbed to the top of the rock and scanned the encircling sea-horizon.

He had examined every square foot of the island and had found no evidences of a past or present man other than himself, except that two-inch nail half-driven into the tree-trunk.

It was such a trivial thing. Its very triviality magnified its importance in his neurasthenic mind. The failure to account for it irritated the castaway's sense of isolation.

He decided to forget it; but it would not be forgotten. He gave up his search for human relics. He kept away from the tree. But in the nights the nail came into his dreams.

He did not dream of it exclusively, or all the time. It flitted in and out of his sleep visions—a sort of *leit motif*—the nail!

One night he slept like a child, dreaming of nothing heavier than butterflies. All at once he found himself sitting bolt upright in the darkness, and his brain was filled with interrogation points.

Who?—When?—Why?—?

He lay awake the rest of the night. Next night it was the same. Then he made a discovery. As long as he tried to exclude the nail from his thoughts, sleep would not come. But the moment he yielded and let his fancies play around the nail, a delicious peace stole over him and he fell into a—was it sleep, or a kind of trance?

Yet he dreamed while in this condition, and it was always about the nail. Once, in a semi-humorous vision, he saw a speck appear on the horizon. He watched it approach the island. It was a small boat rowed by a man. As it came nearer he saw that the man was dressed like a sailor.

The curiosity which was consuming Hammil like a fever influenced even his dream actions. When the sailor beached the boat, Hammil hid himself and spied. He saw the man take a hammer and a single nail from the boat and steal up the slope toward the tree.

As the sailor passed Hammil's hiding-place the castaway saw, without surprise, that the man from the boat was the Devil himself, despite the sailor disguise.

The Devil skulked past the dreamer's hiding-place with a grin

on his face, the hammer in his right hand and the nail daintily held between the thumb and forefinger of his left. The Devil went to the tree, drove in the nail half-way, then fell down on the ground in convulsions of silent, diabolical laughter.

By and by the fiend, still shaking with mirth, returned to the boat, got in, and rowed away. The man in hiding watched until the boat became a speck on the horizon and finally disappeared.

The morning after this odd dream, Hammil went to the tree and himself indulged in a fit of silent laughter. It was a subtle jest, this. Only the Devil himself could have conceived the idea of sailing over almost uncharted seas to drive a nail in a tree on an uninhabited island and leave it for the utter bewilderment of a lone aftercomer.

There came a day when Hammil sat in his shack with his head in his hands. His face was lined deeply, and the hair over his temples had become streaked with gray. The realization had at last come to him that, if a solution of the mystery of the nail did not occur soon, he would become mad.

How did that nail get there?

Suddenly he started to his feet, uncovering his face with an abrupt movement. He stared straight before him with eyes that were ablaze with a strange idea. His countenance was radiant.

He uttered a cry of triumph, dashed out of the shack and made for the tree with the nail in it.

Arrived there, he picked up a sharp-pointed stone from the ground, fell on his knees at the tree-base and feverishly began to dig.

It was a full month before alarm for the missing passenger-cruiser became a certainty of mishap. Then a searching steamer sailed in her track. Hammil's island was the last of the group to be visited, and he was the last to be picked up of seventeen survivors.

The officers of the searching steamer knew there was a man on the island before they landed. They could see his shack, and presently they saw the man himself.

A junior officer commanded the boat that went to bring him off. The boat also carried the ship's doctor and the carpenter.

The castaway seemed mildly glad to see them. He was a withered old man and very slight in build. He had peculiar white hair, like frosted silver, tarnished.

"I know you," said he to the landing officer. "You are the Devil. But I have your secret!"

The officer stared at the man. The ship's doctor whispered something in the officer's ear. The white-haired castaway misinterpreted the action.

"That's all right," said he. "I'll show you. In fact, I'll be glad to. It has—er—" He knitted his brows—"preyed on me. Very glad to be able to show you. Come along!"

Wondering, the junior officer, the doctor and the carpenter, followed the man along the beach, past the shack and up the wooded slope.

His pace quickened as he neared the tree with the nail in it. He turned an excited countenance over his shoulder and raised a finger, bidding the others come silently.

He tip-toed the last twenty yards to the tree, sank upon his knees at the base and, clasping his hands, began to pray aloud—to the nail!

The junior officer and the doctor exchanged glances. The latter sadly shook his head. But the carpenter crept forward and stared long and with increasing amazement at the inch of steel sticking out of the tree-trunk.

Presently, while the white-haired man babbled softly, the carpenter lifted his eyes to the officers. His facial expression was that of a man who turns from the first contemplation of Niagara, or from a reverie over the riddle of the Sphinx.

"Now, how in thunder did *that* get there?" said he, pointing a forefinger at the nail.

The castaway's babble abruptly ceased. He looked up at the carpenter with a childlike smile.

"Very annoying—isn't it?—that nail," he murmured, and rolled over on his back.

"He's sound asleep, poor devil!" said the ship's doctor, rising from an examination of the prostrate Hammil.

Then, having found no traces of any other human being on the island, they took the castaway aboard.

Goose Eggs.*

BY THOMAS GRANT SPRINGER.

THE great Merlin, whose mystifying modern marvels had set the vaudeville audiences of San Francisco agog, was taking a week's layoff to view the wonders of the City of the Sundown Straits before proceeding on his entertaining way. It was his first trip west and he was making it a sort of profit-yielding holiday, but two performances a day did not leave him leisure enough to gratify the curiosity with which the city had invested him. So he and his professional assistant, who was also his private friend, were doing the town on their own time.

Professional sight-seeing through the medium of the "rubber-neck car" did not appeal to him. He preferred to nose about odd corners off the beaten track of vulgar tourists in company with his friend Morin, who, in spite of a glass eye, made the good one work overtime if there was anything worth observing.

As is usual with investigative strangers, they soon knew more of the odd corners of town than most of the natives, and after several days of industrious loitering, had covered most of the out-of-the-way foreign sections, where life is transplanted with old country customs, and has taken root and blossomed in native fragrance undisturbed by the careless, almost alien stream that flows past it. The Italian, Spanish and Slavonic quarters gazed calmly at the unobtrusive strangers as they wandered in, and then returned to their work of pleasure unannoyed by their quiet presence.

It was toward the latter part of the week that they finally wandered into Chinatown which they had purposely avoided so far on account of the swarming tourists that usually infest it. John Chinaman has advanced mightily along occidental business highways, and his orientalism in San Francisco Chinatown has fast become merely a lure to coax the souvenir seeker's coin from his purse in exchange for the trifles whose value he inflates with a romance born of too much advertising. Merlin knew this full well, and avoiding the

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main thoroughfares where life was too evidently a revised copy of occidental progress, dragged his companion into the little sheltered byways where one still finds the fortune teller with his jar of sticks, the pipe mender with his little rotary hand drill, the sidewalk stands with their curious oriental sweetmeats that have not lost the power to charm the coolie class, who are yet shy in the presence of the "white devils."

They played with the gaily caparisoned brown babies that were sunning themselves along the sidewalks; sampled vari-colored cakes whose exteriors barely hinted at their possible concoction; chewed insipid blocks of sugar cane and even defied digestion by introducing into their systems a conically rolled leaf stuffed with shreds of cocoanut, "china nuts," raw citron and weird roots, herbs and confections, calculated to surprise the gastric juice into violent convulsions.

But most of all they studied the imperturbable yellow faces that as yet, unaccepting the occidental customs, preserved the calm with which Confucius had invested them.

"I wonder," speculated Merlin to his companion, "if anything short of physical violence would set the muscles behind those masks into motions vivid enough to reflect anything resembling emotion."

"I don't know," answered Morin. "They look to me like sphinxes made out of putty."

"Well, I would just like to scare up enough mental excitement in the sphinx's interior so that the earthquake would jar the crust."

"I'll bet it would be some earthquake," commented Morin slangily.

The idea took possession of Merlin. There was something uncanny about the expressionless countenances to him, for his professional experiences were filled with a conglomeration of features over which varying expressions played like the wind ripples over the surface of quiet waters, and he was used to rippling a sea of faces with his art. He would have loved to have had an audience of Chinese to perform before, for the pure joy of awakening their surprise, of showing them that he was indeed a "white devil."

"Morin," he said suddenly, "I'd give a week's salary to give a performance before a big audience of these fellows just to see what they would do."

"Yes," replied Morin, "and you would give several weeks' salary to get away from them for they would mob you."

"Nonsense, look at the Japanese jugglers and magicians."

"Oh, the Japanese always have been tricky little monkeys, but

John Chinaman is a serious-minded individual. He has about as much sense of humor as a losing poker player has of the witty remarks a bystander makes behind his chair."

"I wonder," mused Merlin, as they paused before one of the little hole-in-the-wall shops whose stock in trade was as mixed as an East Side pawnbroker's window. The proprietor stood leaning against the door-jamb, smoking little pinches of tobacco in a pipe that looked like a musical instrument. His round face shone in the backing gloom of the shop like a yellow full moon, with the placidity of centuries of philosophy. Beside him stood a basket of eggs. Merlin looked at them speculatively, and his brooding mind hatched a scheme.

"How much?" he inquired.

"Thlee for ten centee," answered the Chinaman without shifting his position.

Merlin picked up three eggs in his hand and turned them over.

"Are they good eggs?" he asked.

"Heap good, velly flesh," answered John, slightly stirred at the prospect of trade.

Several passing Chinamen paused in idle curiosity to watch the white man's bargaining. Merlin drew a dime from his vest pocket and handed it to the merchant, who took it with careful carelessness. Merlin continued to turn the eggs over in his hand, and the loitering crowd of celestials thickened to see the well-dressed stranger and his odd purchase, for he seemed to accept them without being wrapped up as a matter of course. Morin himself wondered what Merlin intended to do with his foolish purchase, but he was rather used to his companion's vagaries.

"Now I am just going to see if these eggs are really good," said Merlin, addressing the merchant, "and if they are as good as I think, I'll buy the whole basket."

"Him all good," and the merchant began to show signs of trade activity at the prospects of an extensive deal. Merlin looked about him; there was quite a little group of Chinamen on the sidewalk. He took one of the eggs, struck it against the corner of the door then broke it carefully open, and looking into it gravely, extracted a five-dollar gold piece which he examined carefully, and then tucked into his vest pocket. He smiled into the merchant's face, which was in a trance of incredulity. The crowd of Chinamen edged closer. In a mysterious manner they seemed to thicken and gain numbers, as if called by some mystic signal.

Merlin threw the eggshell into the gutter. One Chinaman picked

it up quickly and examined it carefully. A subdued murmur of excitement ran through the crowd. He took the second egg with a nonchalant manner, and tapping it against his heel broke the shell. The rapidly swelling crowd edged closer with a general craning of necks. The merchant, his mouth agape, his eyes protruding, stood as if hypnotized. Opening the egg, Merlin extracted a ten-dollar gold piece, held it up to the light, tucked it into his pocket, and cast the shell away. A wild scramble for it immediately ensued.

Merlin smiled into the face of the shopkeeper, nodded as if satisfied thus far and broke the third egg. There was an intaking of breath from the crowd, that was like a sudden gust through a sycamore grove, then an awed silence as Merlin drew out a twenty dollar gold piece, deposited it in his pocket and cast the shell away, wiping his hands on his handkerchief. The crowd didn't stir.

"Yes," said Merlin pleasantly, to the merchant who stood like a graven image, "they are fresh eggs. I will take the whole basket."

Instantly the Chinaman was galvanized into action. "No, no, no!" he cried wildly, seizing the basket and disappearing into the store with it. The crowd poured in after him, and instantly the shop became a bedlam of chatter like a cage full of excited monkeys.

"Merlin," said Morin quietly, "the sphinx has awakened, but I don't think we had better wait until she speaks. I have too much respect for a lady's secrets. Besides I don't understand Chinese."

"I should like to see the finish—" hesitated Merlin.

"If you linger it is likely to be ours," and he drew his companion down the street, but like Lot's wife Merlin lingered to look back, and was in his turn petrified to see the little shop vomiting Chinese as from the mouth of a dragon. They came tumbling into the street like a human omelette, streaked and striped with the yolks and whites of eggs, for, reversing the legend of the goose, they had started an immediate and violent investigation. Leading the van and violently blowing a police whistle, came the proprietor of the shop, and in an instant Merlin and his companion were surrounded by a shrieking, chattering mob that looked like a sudden exodus of chicks from an incubator. No shell game artist at a country fair could have been in more danger of physical violence from "wised" yokels who had been fleeced by him, than was Merlin from the wrath his own mystic art had brought upon him.

Just then a burly policeman pushed through the crowd with gruff inquiry. Merlin's polite tones were drowned in the wild bedlam of pigeon English against the hawk in the dove cot. The gesticulations of his accusers became more violent as their clamor rose, and

Merlin, fearing that not even the majesty of the law would be sufficient to protect him, saw that it was a case of "magician, save thyself." Instantly he made several passes in the air like the preliminary movements of a hypnotist. The Chinamen, convinced that the man was indeed a "white devil," fell back a few paces, and the silence of terror fell instantly upon them. The policeman, mystified, looked from the crowd to Merlin, uncertain as to what action to take. Merlin saved him the trouble by turning to Morin, making a few passes over his face and then plucking his glass eye from the socket held it up for general inspection. The quick-witted Morin, with a diabolical grin, instantly swept the circle of faces about him with the yawning, vacant red socket. With a wild yell of horror the Chinamen stampeded, vanishing into doorways here and there like frightened rabbits in a warren.

"What the devil is all this monkey business?" inquired the astonished policeman as soon as he found his tongue. Merlin presented his card with a bow. The policeman took it, and a slow grin overspread his face as Morin replaced his glass eye.

"Oh, I seen you the other night at the Orphum," he chuckled, "but you better beat it out of this. It ain't no place to give a free show." And he laughed uproariously at the rest of the story as he escorted them to the limit of his beat.

The Double "O."*

BY ROBERT W. FISHER.

"WHOOPEE!" came a voice from the back of the smoke-filled room. "Whoopee! I've done it."

Bud Hawkins looked up to see a tall individual dancing around the roulette table, while the dealer calmly counted out some twenty-dollar gold pieces. Activities at the crap, stud and draw poker tables also ceased because of the noise made by the man.

"I got the double "O." Everybody come and drink with me," and the lucky man hurried to the bar and threw down one of the shining gold pieces. The crowd rushed forward, and Bud was pressed up against the stranger and the bar.

"This sure is a lucky day for Lon Jones," said the man as he turned to Bud. "And I guess you're my mascot," he chuckled, as he slapped Bud on the shoulder. "You see, I won just as you came in."

"I'm glad I gave somebody luck," said Bud, as he reached for his glass, which the fat bartender had just filled. "Here's how."

"You ought to try your luck," said Lon Jones, as they stayed at the bar, the others having returned to the games. "That game's easy. I won seven hundred. Have another drink."

Bud took it.

"I ain't lucky," he said. "I dropped my roll last year when I was ready to go back home and buy a farm. I had to herd sheep another whole year, and you bet I'm not going to lose my money now after working so hard."

"Luck will change, you know," put in the chubby-faced bartender, who had been listening.

"Sure it will," Lon corroborated him. "Come back with me; I'm going to try again and I want you to give me luck."

The dealer nodded at Bud's companion when he returned, glanced casually at Bud, taking only an instant Bud knew, to see his spare well-knit frame, his worn clothes, his youthful sunburned face

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covered with a fuzzy growth of hair, his clear blue eyes and his battered hat. Then the dealer spun the wheel, and the youth flushed as he thought how boyish he had appeared.

Bud watched, fascinated, as Lon Jones laid his bets. Lon was lucky for he won time and again. Bud's blood began to flow faster.

Lon turned to his protégé. "I'm going to try that double "O" again."

The youth held his breath as the dealer spun the wheel. The little ball danced and whirled around. The wheel slowed, then stopped, and the ball dropped into the magic pocket.

"Yow!" yelled the delighted Lon. "Yow! I did it again."

He caught Bud in his arms and hugged him. Bud's heart was pounding away as he thought of the easy money his companion was getting. Fourteen hundred dollars in a day, three times as much as he made in a year. It didn't seem fair, he thought, and he wondered if his luck had changed.

Lon gathered up his earnings, seven hundred dollars, for he had been playing twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"You're all right," he said to Bud. "You come with me, I'll show you a good time."

Bud looked over at the table. His face was flushed, his breath was coming faster. Why not, he thought, why not. My luck has changed, I can go home with a big pile. He turned to Lon Jones.

"I want to try it," he said. "Just once, to see if I am lucky."

"Never can tell till you try," laughed Lon as he jingled his winnings. "Go to it."

The dealer turned an impassive face toward Bud and waited.

"Don't try the Double "O" now, work up to it," advised Lon, "Play the black or red, or even or odd."

Bud played black—and won.

That settled it, he was lucky.

He looked at the dealer. That person was equally impassive, winning or losing. It isn't his money he is playing with, reflected Bud. As for Bud, his eyes glistened, his hands shook, and he talked nervously.

"Come on for a walk," urged Lon. "You're a sight too nervous to play a man's game now."

"I've struck a winning streak," Bud returned, as he won on an even number.

"That there game will wait," insisted Lon. "You come along," and he dragged Bud away.

"Don't go away mad," called the bartender after them. "Better have another."

The two accepted his offer then left. Pendleton in the early days contained no amusement places except saloons and gambling houses, and there was but one train a day out of the place, so Lon and Bud found little to do. They drifted into a Chinese restaurant for supper, Lon eating heartily, while Bud, in whose veins now flowed blood feverish with the gambling mania, ate little. He wanted to get back to the game.

"Eat hearty," urged Lon. "We'll be able to tie a kink in the tiger's tail better if we eat."

Bud shook his head. "I don't feel hungry," he stated.

When they returned to the saloon the evening crowd was pouring in. The two had a good-night drink with the bartender who was leaving, then stepped back to the gambling tables.

They were filled with men who were winning or losing, calmly or excitedly, according to their dispositions. Bud and Lon had to wait for some time before either could get a seat. Finally Lon took a vacant chair and started playing. He won the first time, then lost ten times in succession, playing twenty-dollar gold pieces each time.

"I'm hoodooed," he growled. "I'm going to try some other game. You play," and he gave Bud his chair.

Bud had hardly taken his seat when the man next him made a small winning and got up saying, "I'm ahead of the game," and quit.

"Kind of a piker," sneered the dealer. Bud resolved not to be a piker.

Bud was lucky and won several bets. His winnings now amounted to about two hundred dollars. He began to plunge and tried the double "O," the number that paid thirty-five to one instead of the even payments on even and odd or the colors.

The ball kept away from the pocket. Then Bud changed back to his old system and kept even for awhile. Occasionally he stayed out and looked over at Lon, who having been unlucky at shooting craps, had tackled a poker game. From the profanity at that table, Bud judged his friend was also unlucky at that game.

Three o'clock came, and most of the players had gone. Lon and his partners in the poker game stayed and Bud, a big hairy-faced miner from Florence, and a local merchant, a dried-up snarling person, remained at the roulette wheel. Lon was losing his winnings and Bud began to dig into his pocket for the money he had saved to buy that eastern farm.

Prudence urged him to quit while he had the money, but the lust for gold had him in its grip and urged him on and on.

Finally with an oath Lon rose and called out, "I'm broke. Ain't that hell?" The other poker players grinned and quit. The local man at the roulette wheel left and Lon dropped into his place.

"Four o'clock," he said. "Ain't you going to quit?"

"I've got to win," said Bud feverishly, as he plunged again and lost. "I've got to win. I want to take that train for home at six thirty this morning."

He lost again.

The big miner left in a short time and the leader stifled a yawn as he turned to his task of trimming Bud. The saloon was deserted now and the night bartender was snoring behind the bar.

Six o'clock came, and Lon had dropped to sleep. Bud was wide awake and nearly broke. The dealer was mechanically turning the wheel. Bud played a twenty on the number 15. The wheel spun, then slowed and the ball fell into the 13 pocket. Bud's heart sank but he cheered up when the ball jumped into the 15 pocket and stayed there. The dealer paid him five to one for that. Bud left the one hundred dollars standing on the double "O" and lost.

Bud glanced over at Lon from whose pocket a big revolver protruded. Then he forced himself to look away. Anything but that, he thought. "My God, will I have to stay here another year?" he asked himself, and the only answer that came into his mind was "yes."

He felt in his pocket. He found three twenties. He played one on red—and lost. He put one on an even number—and lost again. Twenty dollars left! He looked around. The sun had risen and was shining through cracks in the wall. One sunbeam struck him on the neck. It was within a few minutes of train time. Bud looked at the bartender. He was asleep. Lon was snoring gently and the dealer could hardly keep his eyes open. He glanced at the pile of gold in front of the dealer and again at the revolver.

"I'll take one more chance," he thought, and played the remaining twenty on the double "O." The dealer sleepily turned the wheel. The little ball rolled—and forever, it seemed to Bud, then it stopped in the double "O" hole—and jumped out.

"Broke—my God!" thought Bud, as the dealer took the money.

He felt in his pockets again as a forlorn hope and found—nothing.

He laid his hand on the table and bowed his head, a desperate resolve in his mind.

The dealer looked up and spun the wheel. The ball dropped in the double "O" hole. The dealer sufficiently awake to see the table dimly, said, "All right, stranger, you win," and paid over seven hundred dollars in gold.

Bud looked at the money, then at the dealer, unable to comprehend. Then he glanced at the table where he had placed his bets, saw what had caused the dealer to pay him, grabbed the money and ran for the depot, which the train was just leaving.

The sound of the train woke Lon and he poked the dealer in the side.

"The kid's gone," said Lon.

"He left a twenty there," said the dealer as he reached for it. Then his eyes opened wider and he saw that the "twenty" was a round bit of sunshine, cast from a knothole in the wall, and which had struck the table when Bud leaned forward out of the way.

The dealer and Lon rushed to the door, wakening the bartender as they passed.

They looked out to see the train picking up speed and on the back step was a well-built young man waving a battered hat.

Bud was on his way home.

The Grasshopper.*

BY LAURA CAMPBELL.

HOMER SMILEY was peculiarly made. His legs were long and thin, and angular at the joints. His shoulders, while not actually deformed, seemed often, especially in moments of nervous excitement, on the point of hunching up until they almost touched his ears. His spine formed a visible ridge down the center of his back, he being too innocent of fat or muscle with which to cover it, and too poor to engage a tailor who, with the usual ingenuity of his craft, might have devised a means to do so. His face was so long that his chin seemed to hang upon his chest, and bore a striking resemblance to — Did you ever take up a grasshopper by the nip of its back and brazenly try to stare the little green fellow out of countenance? Then, you have Homer Smiley's face as clearly before you as though you were looking at it in his family photograph album. Moreover, when he walked, he stepped out on his angularly long legs with such a jerking, half-hopping, spasmodic movement that all small boys, at sight of him, invariably on that instant, put their small fists to their mouths and called out mockingly and lustily, in the derisive way peculiar to their kind, "Grass-hopp-er! Grass-hopp-er!"

Homer did not mind. At the sound, his blue eyes, which were frank and good-natured in expression, would crinkle up into humorous lines at the corners; and he would sometimes give an additional violent hop or two to his stride just to prove that he thoroughly understood and appreciated the sally. He was very much used to it. In fact, he was rather proud of it. He had seen, in his travels (and since the age of twenty he had traveled much) many curious specimens of mankind. He had seen some men who strongly resembled the fishes of the sea —

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shads and porgies mostly with a few striped bass and brook trout thrown in by way of variety; genial, witty fellows they had all been, too. Then he had met with a few small, light-footed, bright-eyed creatures, generally of whitish or grayish complexion, both men and women, that resembled nothing so much as little white or gray mice. Once he had come upon two lads who looked so much like sheep that they might have been the original models upon whom all individuals of that species had been patterned. He had known dozens of persons that looked like birds — owls, eagles, parrots, and even turkey-gobblers. But he had never met with any that, like himself, were perfect counterparts, humanly speaking, of that high-stepping insect of the green fields — the common grasshopper. He considered himself unique, a curious specimen fashioned in one of Nature's rare moods of real originality. He was aware that, with the passing of time, the marked peculiarities of individuals often gradually faded and sometimes died away altogether. His one hope was that, in his case, this phenomenon of Nature might not happen; and did any period of time elapse, say, a week or ten days in which he missed the staring wonder of passing strangers, which was their habitual recognition of his strongly marked personality, or in which the small boys failed to halloo the call which was their tribute to him as a man, in their eyes, romantically marked, he never failed to be conscious of a certain anxiety lest, with age, he be losing his fantastic individuality and was perhaps becoming actually commonplace — a man in no wise different from the general run of his fellows.

This feeling of anxiety was particularly strong upon him on that bright morning in May when, at the age of forty-five, he was returning to Rome, his native town, which he had left some twenty-five years before. In Rome, in those early days, he had been a "character" or curiosity, he knew that the village had always had a certain pride in him as a town appurtenance, and that when it pointed him out to strangers, it did so with a finely proprietary air. When he had left the place, the wanderlust in his heart urging him to seek his fortune beyond the hills, he had been followed beyond the outskirts of Rome by a crowd of urchins, and their shrill cry of "Grass-hopp-er! Grass-

hopp-er!" had been the last words of farewell that sounded in his ears as he disappeared over the brow of the hill, on the road that led to the next town ten miles away.

It was upon this same road that he was now returning. Before him lay the brow of the hill. He remembered that those crying urchins were, by this time, all grown men, probably with many urchins of their own. What would be his welcome in old Rome? Would any remember him? Would his old prestige be quickly re-established? Or was he becoming too much like other folk? He remembered that in the last town through which he had passed on his vagabond way, not a single person had so much as looked in his direction. In the nervousness of the moment, he unconsciously hunched his shoulders till they almost touched his ears; his chin was upon his chest; his long legs jerked spasmodically.

"Grass-hopp-er! Grass-hopp-er! O-ee — Grass-hopp-er!"

Clear and shrill and full of derisive wonder, the cry came from the roadside.

Homer Smiley's long legs came to a sudden stop. His hunched shoulders dropped to their normal position, and his blue eyes crinkled humorously as they turned toward the rail fence that ran along one side of the road.

Upon its rickety, uncertain top a small boy sat perched astride. The square toes of one bare foot were braced against the fence-post, his body was in crouching posture, ready for an instant bound and a quick flight should the man in the road take offense.

But the man in the road stood still, pursing up his lips as though for a long whistle. Instead he issued a cheery "Hello! You seem to know me!"

The small boy relaxed. Cautiously, he unbraced his foot, slid from the fence, and in deliberate and detailed glances examined the man in the road from head to foot.

"Well?" Homer waited for the verdict.

"I know you." The urchin made the announcement triumphantly. "You're the grasshopper man."

The grasshopper man gravely nodded assent. "How'd you know?" he queried.

"Huh!" the small boy grunted his quick recognition of an idiotic question. "I'd a-knowed you anywhere. But I heard Pop talking about you yesterday at dinner. He said to Ma, 'What do you think? Tom Smiley, the shoe man, expects his brother home to-morrow morning.' And Ma said, 'What! the grasshopper man?' And I said, 'What's a grasshopper man?' And then Pop told me all about you. And all the other fellows' fathers told them too. But I wanted to beat 'em and see you first, so I got up soon as it was light and come up the road, and pretty soon you came hoppin' along. And — I saw you first."

The grasshopper man was regarding the small face curiously, trying to trace resemblances. To which of those imps of old did this small imp belong?

"What is your name, my lad?"

"Plato."

The urchin answered sturdily, but a sudden gloom clouded his face.

"And your last name?"

"McSweeny."

"Good Lord! worse than mine," exclaimed Homer Smiley.

The small boy nodded. "I know," he said; "yours is Homer. He was a poet. Mine was a philos'fer. I'd like to punch his face."

The grasshopper man grinned down at him understandingly. Plato McSweeny reddened beneath his freckles. Then he grinned sheepishly back. A bond of sympathy was established between them. He held out his grimy little hand.

"I got to go now, Mr. Grasshopper Man," he said; "and if ever — if ever you are in dire — " for a moment his eyes fell on the yellow corner of a paper-backed novel that protruded from his pocket; then he looked quickly up again; — "if ever you get in an awful scrape, you just r'member Plato McSweeny."

"On my honor, I will," the grasshopper man solemnly responded, and he turned toward the brow of the hill with a light heart. So far his reception promised well.

When he reached the brow, he paused and looked about him. Directly below him, in the flat of the valley, lay old Rome. His

heart leaped at the sight. The place had hardly changed since he had left it twenty-five years before. The gardens lay green and glowing in the morning sun; the houses seemed whiter and more trim than ever; from many of the chimneys smoke was lazily curling. He began to recognize old landmarks. Then his eyes roved farther — up the opposite hillside, and for the first time saw the newly laid out streets and the crassly designed villas of a modern suburb. That must be the New Rome that his brother was always boasting about in his letters. Homer Smiley's quick glance took in all the ugly details. "Bah! they've spoiled that hillside! They've cut down too many trees. They've — "

The quick, happy chime of a church bell rang suddenly out, preliminary to the telling of the hour. Homer swung off on the downward slope at a quick pace. It was his brother's breakfast hour, and his brother was a methodical man and liked everybody to be on time.

A half hour later, and he was actually sitting opposite his brother again at table; and it was as though the twenty-five years of absence had never been at all. Little old Aunt Hetty, who had been Thomas Smiley's housekeeper ever since the beginning of his widowerhood a few years before, hovered nervously between them, waiting first on one, then on the other, with an anxiously pacifying air. For after the first half-embarrassed ten minutes of meeting and greeting were over, almost before they were aware of it, they were on the verge of a quarrel, just as had happened that morning twenty-five years before, when Homer had left old Rome to seek his fortune in the world. Ever since his entrance into the dining-room, his brother had watched him steadily and keenly above his coffee cup. He noted Homer's general air of genteel shabbiness; his eyes were quick to see the greenish tinge of the old black coat, the frayed edge of the spotlessly clean collar and cuffs. And watching, his eyes became suspicious and resentful. He was hardly listening to his brother's quick, eager questions about the changes that had taken place in the town, and about old friends and acquaintances.

"Rome's just the same as it used to be," he answered, surlily,

"except for the new town that has sprung up across the valley. Seems to me you're pretty interested, considering you never cared enough about the place to settle down into one of its respectable citizens."

Old Aunt Hetty's hands began to flutter nervously above the coffee urn.

"Homer, you ready for another cup?" she put in eagerly. "Why, Homer, you know, I can't get over you — you look just the same as ever. You haven't changed a bit."

Thomas Smiley grunted scornfully. "It's nothing to his credit, I'll warrant. He's had an easy life of it. He's never settled down. Come, young man, ain't you going to give an account of yourself? Why d'ye suppose I sent for you? What you been doing? Why didn't you come sooner? I've been waiting these three months. Didn't you get my letter? Eh?"

Homer put down his cup and put his napkin to his mouth with deliberate slowness before he answered. He had hoped that at least a few days would elapse before he would refeel the old irritation that close association with his brother always brought upon him.

"No, Tom, I didn't get your letter;" he spoke respectfully. Somehow, even at forty-five, it was difficult to get over the habit of being respectful to a brother who was twenty years his senior. "It's been following me about from town to town all these months. But I was mighty glad to get it, I can tell you. And I am glad to be — here."

"And you haven't changed a bit, Homer. You're just the same as ever." Aunt Hetty's wrinkled cheeks were tinged with a pretty pink flush.

"From town to town, eh?" The suspicion in Thomas Smiley's eyes changed to triumph. "So I was right. You haven't settled nohow. You've never learned any trade. You've never set up in any business. You've never married. What have you been doing, eh?"

Homer's blue eyes suddenly went into humorous wrinkles at the corners. "I've — I reckon I'm a sort of traveling landscape architect," he said.

"A traveling what?" Thomas Smiley gasped.

"A sort of traveling landscape architect and gardener, and a master-workman, if you please — when they leave me alone. I've left my designs in some garden in almost every town and village in the country. Thomas," he leaned forward, eagerly, "you should see some of 'em — my gardens."

"And have you made any money?" The older man asked the question in scornful triumph, as his eyes again roved over his brother's shabby attire.

Homer's smile grew broader. His shoulders hunched nervously up until they almost touched his ears.

"Not much," he confessed, "but I've always been comfortable. A man once told me — he was a rich man, Thomas, plenty of money — he told me that if I'd settle in some one place, I could make a pile of dust with my — my taste for gardens. It's a sort of a talent, you see, a sort of a gift, same as some folks have for painting pictures or writing books."

Aunt Hetty was visibly interested. When she was a girl she herself had painted flowers on china. "Oh, Homer, why don't you?" she panted. "Why don't you settle and — and begin?"

"Well, you see, Aunty Hetty, I'm looking for the exactly right place." His eyes grew dreamy. "I've been looking all these years for the exactly right place — just as painting people have to look a long time for the exactly right color, and writing people for the exactly right word. I've been looking for a garden" — He began to trace imaginary designs on the tablecloth before him, while the scorn in his brother's eyes grew deeper, and the little aunt's flush grew pinker. "I reckon it's existing somewhere — just for me. And when I find that garden, I'll turn it into a regular show-place, pretty much as you would put your finest shoes into your best shop window, Thomas." Again, he paused, dreaming. "Everybody that sees that garden will want one just exactly like it. Their eyes will thirst for it, and — "

"But, Homer, you might be traveling all your life, and never — never — " Aunt Hetty's voice died tremulously away.

"But I will. It's somewhere waiting for me, I know. It's got to be a queerish, run-down, rough little place, shaped as

rugged as a bit of woodland. Wherever I find that garden, there I shall settle. I've money enough — "

"Johanna James has a queer garden — " Aunt Hetty looked guiltily at her older nephew and stopped abruptly.

He had leaned forward. His eyes had grown hard. His lips were pressed determinedly together in one decisive white line. He struck his fist so violently upon the table that Aunt Hetty's hands went out in trepidation toward the coffee cups.

"Now, Homer Smiley, you just listen to me." For a moment he filliped his forefinger methodically upon the tablecloth as he gathered his thoughts together. Then he went on with a sudden and unusual calm that made Aunt Hetty eye him with heightened anxiety.

"Homer Smiley, you're forty-five years old. When a man gets to be forty-five years old it's high time he quit fooling and begin to settle down. You haven't asked me why I sent for you. Now, listen. I'm going to tell you — I'm going to tell you square. It's about that sign — with my name on it in gold, that stands above my shoe shop windows: 'Thomas Smiley, dealer in Custom Boots and Shoes'; it's stood there shining out on Main Street now for forty years. I'm sixty-five. I — I don't expect to live forever. And I don't like to think that when I go, that old sign'll have to go too. I don't like it. I don't like to think of a Jones or a Smith or a Vandevere shining out on Main Street instead. Somehow, Vandeveres and shoes don't seem to mix. And I — I want to be sure that that shop of mine will have a Smiley running it for the next twenty-five or thirty years and — after — Homer — "

He leaned toward his brother eagerly. The hard line about his mouth had disappeared. "Homer, you're the only Smiley, after me, that's living. Homer, I want to see you in that shop before I die, settled solidly for life and carrying on the business. You ought to be settled, Homer. You ought to be married. If you had sons — "

He passed his hand heavily across his eyes. "It isn't a scrimpy proposition I'm offering you. You'll be working with me as junior partner so long as I live. After that there'll be twenty-five thousand dollars coming to you, providing you marry

and agree to stay in the business for life. Wait a minute — wait a minute — "

Homer had vainly tried to interrupt. His brother went on. " I'm going to give you a fair show. I'm going to put you in the shop for a month. I'm going to give you a good chance to quit your fool ways and settle down. Your grasshopping habits have been the ruin of you. And now, Homer — " he rose and pushed back his chair with a breathless motion — " No, no, don't you speak. I'll not hear a word. You go shine your shoes, Homer, and start in the shop this morning. No, not a word. I'm giving you a month to think about it."

With his final word he passed into the hall. Aunt Hetty also stole quietly out. Homer sat for a moment staring at the sunshine that flickered on the snowy breakfast cloth. Then he shifted in his chair and crossed one angular leg comfortably over the other. His eyes fell on the dusty toes of his worn shoes. He tried to imagine what it would be like to have them black and shining. He remembered the few occasions in his life when he had worn them so. He remembered that he had felt very uncomfortable. But now, for a month, he would have to shine them every day. His brow knit anxiously. An unusual pucker formed between his eyes. Twenty-five thousand dollars! After all, it was a fine sum. It would make him comfortable for life. Perhaps it would be worth the price. Perhaps his brother was right and it was time that he should be settling down. A man at forty-five — well, a man at forty-five is no longer young. And the gardens? — *the* garden?

He suddenly saw, stretched fruitlessly behind him, all those empty years when he had been searching for it. Perhaps it was true — that he had been a great fool, playing the buffoon from town to town — " But I've made some beauties! I've made some beauties! " His eyes began to shine happily. Unconsciously, with his forefinger, he began to trace imaginary designs upon the tablecloth.

" Homer! " His aunt's timid voice aroused him. " Homer, hadn't you better come out on the back porch and shine your shoes? "

He looked up at her with a start. Then, as he looked down

at his dusty boots, his eyes wrinkled humorously at the corners. He passed his hand with a swift, brushing movement across the imaginary designs on the tablecloth.

"I — think I had better," he said.

That evening Thomas Smiley was exultant. He had left the shop an hour earlier than his brother, and was waiting for him in the cool dusk of the front porch. And when Homer's familiar, half-hopping, half-loping figure turned in at the gate, he could have run to meet him with outstretched hands. For the joy of the first day's experience as head partner of a family firm was big within him. But he managed to keep his dignity and his chair and motioned Homer to another.

"Homer, you can't deny that you got along as though you were born to the business. You should have started in years ago. You are very quick and folks certainly take to you. Homer, I must ask Tom Paine, the gilt-letter man, what he'll charge to change the name above the shop to 'Smiley Brothers.' It will look — fine." He leaned back contentedly in his chair. Homer was silent. He was wishing that he had had the training of the vines that grew so primly about the porch. Visions of hundreds of vine-clad porches — little bowers of beauty that he had created — came to him. He could almost smell their exquisite fragrances. But his brother's next words startled him from his reverie.

"Homer, it would be a — a sort of fine finish-up for the day if you'd go to call this evening on Miss Johanna James. You know, in our business, you've got to be sociable. It all helps along. And — you remember Johanna James?"

"I remember."

"Well, I thought maybe you wouldn't. She was a young thing when you left. Now, she's forty-two. She never married. Folks call her an old maid. It's queer — her being an old maid. She don't deserve it. She ought to have married."

He puffed silently at his pipe. "She's been living these last twenty years in the old house on the Saw Mill road. Her aunt lives with her. But the house is being fixed over now so they're staying at Mrs. Rimmel's, up the road a piece. You go to call on her this evening, Homer. She'll think it's real neighborly."

Beneath the brotherly inflection, Homer recognized the voice of the senior partner. His first impulse was to make tangible exhibit of the vague rebellion that the words stirred in his soul; but the impulse died before it could be resolved into action, for the sweet, wonderful breath of late lilacs and early roses cast its sudden magic upon him, and he turned his face hungrily toward the warm dusk of the spring night. After all, why not? It would, as his brother said, be real neighborly. Johanna James had been a pretty girl. Thomas had just given his word for her comeliness as a woman. It was long since he had sat in friendly converse with a woman.

And so it came about, two hours later, that Homer Smiley set out to make his first formal call upon one of the fair sex. He whistled shrilly as he went loping up the country road toward Mrs. Rimmel's. He was aware that his gait was more peculiarly his own than it had ever been before, even in those far-off days which should, properly speaking, have been his normal courting days. As he passed a lamp-post, he made a great effort to walk more sedately. He supposed that he must be nervous. Certainly he did not feel as usual. He smiled. There was a certain wonder, an eager questioning, in his heart. Was it possible that he was at last 'settling down — ' he, Homer Smiley, the grasshopper, the restless one, who had never in his life been contented to bide in any one pasture for longer than six months at a time? He was suddenly conscious, as he turned in at Mrs. Rimmel's gate, that he was vastly curious to look upon the face of Johanna James.

A dim light was shining out upon the porch from the parlor windows. Directly in its glow some one was sitting in a chair, rocking quietly.

"That you, Johanna?" He was surprised at his own quick divination.

"Why — if it isn't — Homer Smiley!"

Then he had her hands and his curiosity was satisfied as she rose and the light fell full on her face. Yes, she was comely; older, quite middle-aged, in fact, but very comely. He was looking at her intently. He saw the quick blush that blazed in her cheeks. Yes, she was good to look upon.

"My — my aunt — she was very tired. She's gone to bed. To-day was baking day."

"Well, I didn't go to school with your aunt. I didn't pick berries or go hay riding with your aunt. Johanna, I've come to see you. I want to talk over old times. I'm hungry for old times and for news of old friends."

"Oh!"

"Johanna, you begin."

* * * * * * *

The month of Homer Smiley's "trial time" as a possible junior partner in his brother's business wanted but one more day for its completion.

On the Friday night before the day in question, Thomas Smiley sat upon his front porch with that air of placid content that is always worn by those who feel that they are not only managing their own affairs well, but are also managing the affairs of other folk with equal acumen.

When his brother joined him he nodded at him approvingly.

"Well, Homer, so you've a night off. Johanna moved back into the old house to-day, eh?"

"Yes, she's — pretty busy." The younger brother stirred uneasily in his chair. He sniffed the air restlessly. Even the fragrance of the roses could not drown the odor of the new leather that had filled his nostrils all day.

"But she'll be expecting you to-morrow night, eh? She'll be wanting to show you her own place. It isn't a bad sort of place except for her fool garden. And she won't have a thing done to it. But," — he eyed his brother slyly — "she'll listen to you, of course, especially as — Homer, d'ye know that by to-morrow night you'll be the junior partner of the firm of Smiley Brothers? I think the sign can go up to-morrow. And Homer, you'll have to get up bright and early in the morning. You know the new lot of summer styles will be in to-morrow."

Like a small boy, Homer squirmed silently in his seat. He was glad that he sat in the shadow so that his brother might not see his face. He felt that he would read his secret in his eyes. For in the last forty-eight hours the passion of the wander-

lust had once more descended upon him, and he knew that it was but a question of a few days or a few hours before he would yield to it. He could feel the fever of it in his soul, and his feet were aching for the long climbs of the highroad.

The next morning Homer rose promptly at the hour which his brother had set for him. As he pulled on his shoes he smiled down at them whimsically with a new resolve in his heart. Thank heaven! he would not need to shine them that morning. What is the use of shining one's shoes when one has fifteen or twenty miles of dusty country road before one? Hurriedly, he packed his old knapsack, tip-toed quietly down the stairs and unbolted the front door. He stood for a moment, eagerly sniffing the fresh morning air as his keen blue eyes followed the long gray ribbon of the highway. Then he moved noiselessly down the garden path, and with his long, jerking stride took to the road.

He plodded lightly and steadily ahead, looking neither to the right nor left. His eyes were shining. His walk was a glorified hop. He was completely happy. He would never smell shoe leather again as long as he lived, if he could help it.

It was not until he had reached the brow of the hill from which he had so gladly looked upon old Rome a month before that any doubt as to the wisdom of his step assailed him. Pausing here, he turned to look his last upon the peaceful valley below him. Instinctively, his eyes wandered to the white walls and the red chimney of the house where lived Johanna and her aunt. A thin, lazy curl of smoke was rising from the red chimney. It made a pleasant picture. He watched it wistfully. His heart contracted with a guilty qualm. "What will she do, I wonder? She thinks — "

In his moment of brief bewilderment he sat down upon a stone by the roadside. He had not considered Johanna at all. All Rome knew that he had been courting her every night since his return. He remembered Johanna's eager, love-lit eyes, beautiful with the wistful hope of the middle-aged woman when she had come to greet him every night at Mrs. Rimmel's doorsill. Again his heart contracted strangely and his brows drew close together in pained perplexity. True, he had made no formal

declaration. But Johanna, starved for love, had come to a quick conclusion without one.

He stared questioningly at the curling smoke of the red chimney in the valley. He shrugged his shoulders nervously until they almost touched his ears. He leaned his long chin upon the palms of his hands, and the ridge of his thin back showed plainly through his coat as he bent forward.

"Grass-hopp-er! Grass-hopp-er!"

He started. The small boy, Plato McSweeny, stood in the road before him, a long fishing rod on his shoulder.

"Hello!"

"Hello yourself," Plato returned the salutation seriously. The grasshopper man's eyes had failed to wrinkle at the corners. The small boy perceived that his old friend was in trouble; and indeed, that he had completely forgotten his presence almost as soon as he had noticed it. Plato took his long rod from his shoulder, and squatted down in the grass to await results.

Homer still stared at the curling smoke of Johanna's homestead. He would break her heart. There was no getting away from the glaring fact of it. He liked Johanna too well to think of it without distress. He would break her heart — unless —

A bright thought had suddenly occurred to him. In the month in which he had become reacquainted with her, he had discovered that Johanna, to her heart's core, was an intense romantic, and was wont to greedily feed on any scanty scrap of romance that came her way. He was convinced that this trait was the real cause of her deep esteem for him. In her eyes he was the romantic traveler. He believed that if, in place of the homely commonplaceness of every-day love, he could give her a real romance to cherish instead, her soul would be satisfied. Even a small letter, passionate, self-revealing, self-sacrificing, would do. She would treasure it all her life. He would not leave her altogether empty of heart.

Hastily he searched in his pocket for a bit of paper. He tore a leaf from his notebook and began to write. It was the first love letter that he had ever written in his life, and he felt, as he wrote, that his impassioned declaration was glorifying the very paper upon which it was written. He told her of his great

love for her, of his adoration, and of the tormenting doubts that had come to him as to his own worthiness; he told her of his shiftless, indolent character; of his inability to settle down to any one trade or business; of his roving, grasshopper-like habits, his gypsying temperament; and of his final condemnation of himself as unfit to be the husband of any worthy woman, especially of such a sweet and noble character as Johanna herself. When he had finished it, he read it over twice, and then in a moment of romantic zeal he added a blazing postscript:

"Johanna, I adore you! I adore you!"

He folded the note carefully and took a silver half-dollar from his pocket. At sight of it, the eyes of the small boy on the grass before him grew round and fixed.

"Plato, I'm in an awful scrape."

The small boy jumped briskly to his feet. "I'm your man," he said, briefly.

Homer handed him the small note and the big coin. "You take it to Miss Johanna James," he directed. "She's in her own house again, you know. You give it into her very own hands, and — " he hesitated — "That's all, Plato, run along."

He watched the brown legs of the little messenger as they trotted sturdily down the hill. He watched them until they turned the corner of the byway that led past Johanna's small white house. Then he turned quickly, adjusted his knapsack, and once more pressed his feet to the gray road.

But his gait lagged strangely. His eyes were on the ground. His long stride fell into a limp, half-hearted walk. He passed another small boy who took no notice of him whatever. Homer Smiley was walking like an ordinary man. "Something must be the matter with me." He turned once more from the roadside and flung himself down in the green coolness of a grassy bank. His heart was heavy within him. Somehow, he could not get the vision of Johanna's eyes, as they had looked the last evening he had called upon her, out of his mind. A great ache gripped him suddenly by the throat. He sat up blinking. His eyes were wide with a large discovery:

"Why — it's all true! — every word I put into that letter! — it's all true! What a fool I am!"

For a moment he stared at the white dust of the roadway. Then he sprang up resolutely and turned his face toward Old Rome again, walking rapidly. "I owe it to her to tell her. I must tell her that it's all true!"

A few minutes later and he was turning from the main road into the byway. Here was the high green hedge that hid Johanna's garden from the public eye. He had never visited her in this house, but he remembered her few words of description, and when he turned in at the gate he caught sight of her white dress beneath the trees. Her head was bent over his letter; but at the sound of his step she looked up. Homer took the letter from her and tossed it to the ground. He caught her two hands.

"Johanna, I've come to tell you that it's all true — every word in the letter — "

"Of course — but — "

He interrupted her breathlessly. "Every word, Johanna, and — and if you can wait until I find a place that will be good for business, where we can — settle down — "

Johanna looked up at him. She spoke simply. "There's plenty of work for a gardener in New Rome," she said; "and I've a bit of a garden here — " she waved her hand toward the large, rough-shaped enclosure in which they stood. "It isn't much of a place, but — "

She paused, almost frightened at the look of sudden and joyous recognition that had leaped into Homer Smiley's eyes. At her words he had glanced about him and for the first time saw the garden.

"Why — why, Johanna, it's the garden I've been looking for all my life," he said. He turned to her. "And to think that it was in little Old Rome with you a-keeping it for me all these years!"

Johanna's eyes were beaming her worship of him. To her he was the Romantic Traveler.

He bent over and pressed one of her rough hands to his lips.

"Johanna, I — oh, I adore you! Why, Johanna, what you crying about?"

The Miniature.*

BY PAUL AUGUSTINE BARRY.

HALT! Who's there?"

Crash! A spurt of flame leaped from the muzzle of the sentinel's rifle, and the shadowy form that had committed the capital military crime—refusal to halt at a sentry's challenge—crumpled into a dark mass on the narrow footpath.

The sound of the shot echoed dully under the dripping trees and against the sodden canvas of the camp, startling the tropic night into momentary alarm.

The sentinel snapped another cartridge into the chamber of his rifle and carefully watched the prostrate form at which he had fired, while he called loudly for the corporal of the guard.

In the savage tropics a soldier soon learns that foolish curiosity is no part of an infantry sentinel's equipment. Where a wounded enemy whom one stoops to succor will suddenly whip out a flame-like creese, and with an expiring effort drive it through the rescuer, and then die happy having slain an infidel dog, the amenities of civilized warfare are soon laid aside.

The sentinel, at a secure distance, and keenly alert for danger from any other source, watched the victim of his shot until the rhythmic thudding of feet on the dew wet ground told of the coming of the relief of the guard.

Halting the approaching men until he was satisfied of their identity, he let them advance, and reported what had occurred to the non-commissioned officer of the guard.

Cautiously advancing to the prostrate figure, holding his rifle at the ready, the corporal convinced himself that the man lying there was dead.

"A good shot, Jones," he muttered to the sentinel, as he knelt beside the body. "If one does not shoot straight the first time in this country his chance for ever firing again isn't much."

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Striking a match against the stock of his rifle he stooped over the dead man.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "It's an officer!"

"I had to shoot!" said the sentinel. "He wouldn't halt and you know our orders."

"It's Captain Orden," said the corporal, in a whisper. "You did your duty—you had to shoot. But Orden! *He* knew the orders. Why—?"

* * * * * *

The captain of the guard leaned his elbows on the rough boards of an improvised table, intently reading one of many letters that the monthly mail had brought him that day.

A candle stuck upright in its own grease flared fitfully, as a wandering breeze from Lake Lanao, shaking the rain-like dewdrops from the trees on to the damp canvas of the tent, stole in through the open flaps.

Suddenly the captain found himself on his feet, listening intently, while his right hand loosened his pistol in its holster. The slow pacing steps of the sentinel outside of the guard tent had stopped. The hot, steamy tropical night seemed waiting, in its velvet blackness.

The sentinel in front of the tent caught a distant call. "Corporal of the Guard, Number Seven!" The tension relaxed, and in an instant a detachment of the guard was away at the double to Post Number Seven.

Wih an unconscious sigh of relief the captain turned to the table and refolded his letters, stuffing them in his pockets while he waited for a report of the cause of the single shot he had heard in the distance.

Soon the sound of the relief slowly returning was followed by a movement at the entrance of the tent. The sergeant of the guard entered and saluted.

"Captain Orden shot by Number Seven, Sir," he reported. "He walked up on Number Seven and would not halt when challenged."

"Where is Captain Orden?" asked the captain of the guard.

"In his tent, Sir," answered the sergeant.

"Take charge of the guard until I return," ordered the captain. "Have you notified the surgeon?"

"Yes, Sir," the sergeant replied. "He is there now."

A few minutes later the captain of the guard met the regimental surgeon dropping the flaps of Orden's tent behind him as he emerged into the quiet company street.

"Good shot, that sentinel," said the surgeon, as he ran his fingers thoughtfully through his grayish beard. "Poor Orden never felt it. But he knew this camp like a book, Captain. God knows we've been in the beastly place long enough for him to. Why should he deliberately walk up on Number Seven?"

"Who knows?" answered the captain, as he opened the flaps and entered the tent.

Orden's body was on his field bed. By the light of a flickering candle on the camp table the captain noticed the tiny blue mark on the forehead, where the sentinel's bullet had found its target.

In warfare soldiers soon become indifferent to death, even accept it as a matter of course, but a wave of bitter sadness swept over the officer as he turned from his friend to the table.

A pile of letters lay there. One, open and face down, seemed about to slip from the rough table to the ground. The officer picked up the sheet of heavy paper and turned it over.

A wedding announcement— He caught the name "Catherine" black on its creamy surface as, with a flush and a feeling almost of sacrilege, he thrust it into an envelope that lay open beside it.

He noticed curiously that none of the other letters had been opened.

A wandering breeze made the candle flicker as he turned to leave the tent, and his eye caught a wavering gleam from something on the trodden earth of the tent floor.

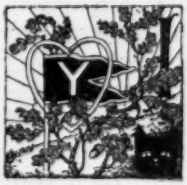
He stooped, to pick up what he saw to be the broken remnant of an exquisite miniature.

The beautiful face had been scarred and twisted as if a frantic heel had driven it hard into the earth, but across the back of the jewel-set frame he could read the name "Catherine."

Placing it beside the letters, the captain of the guard dropped the flaps of the tent behind him.

Black Wins.*

BY RUSSELL PETTIS ASKUE.



"IS black really winning?"—that was the question travelers asked themselves as they gazed at the painting. The title-plate attached to the frame said so—"Black Wins." But somehow the picture seemed to challenge the title.

It represented a game of chess between a youth and the Devil. The Devil had executed a masterful maneuver; and confident of his checkmate, had risen and stood by his chair, grinning with fiendish delight. The young man was bent over the table, his fingers buried in his hair, his eyes on the besieging army of blacks. His face betrayed conflicting emotions. There was hope written there—the hope that lingers in the presence of despair. He seemed to know that he was beaten, yet he still sat at the table, unwilling to admit defeat.

For several years the picture hung in the waiting-room of a railway station in a thriving city. Chess players who beheld it always accepted its challenge, and sought to discover a play by which the boy might escape from the blacks which hemmed him in. Yet the picture did not exert its strange fascination upon students of the game alone. The dramatic situation appealed to all beholders. The Devil struggling with a man for the possession of his soul; the man hopeful in defeat—with so steadfast a hope that one wondered if there was not, after all, the possibility of victory. Yet the title said no; the chess men grouped upon the board seemed emphatic in their denial; and the Devil grinned.

The picture became widely known—yet for a long time almost nothing could be learned of its history. The only information to be gained from the railroad company was that it had purchased it from the widow of a man who had died in a hospital—a man who had been a superintendent or manager or something of some concern or another.

This was rather indefinite. But when, several years later, the widow of another man sought to buy the picture from the company

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—because of its associations, she said—the facts were obtained which, disguised as fiction, are here set forth.

* * * * * *

This, the first chapter in the story, has its setting in a small eastern college.

Lawrence Gregory and Roy Colter were classmates and roommates. Their friendship was of the sturdy sort found rarely among the sons of men. They had been inseparable through preparatory school, and in college shared the same suite, studied or loafed together, and became entangled in the same student troubles. They were both blessed with money and a care-free outlook upon life—these blessings being the probable cause of the afore-mentioned troubles.

Gregory was an unusually irrepressible young man. Each year, when the restraints of football training were over, his boundless energies sought relief in other directions. Colter was his faithful henchman in the planning and execution of daring pranks. Pranks which gained them the admiration of the other fellows, the ill wishes of the faculty, and imminent danger of expulsion from school.

It was in their Junior year that a brief sequence of events occurred which transformed them from thoughtless boys into thinking men.

A young Latin instructor had been engaged in December to take the classes of an old professor who was ill. He entered upon his duties with reckless enthusiasm and immediately "flunked" Larry Gregory. A few evenings later, making his way across the lonely, snowy campus, he was suddenly seized from behind, and carried, kicking and fighting, to an angle among the buildings where the snow was drifted deep. There he was lifted high and permitted to drop, head first.

The Dean, in chapel next morning, spoke at length of the "shameful and brutal attack made last night upon a member of the faculty"—spoke of it as though everybody would understand what he meant. Everybody did. The young instructor was a large man; and everybody, including the Dean and the young instructor, realized that there was only one man in college who could perform such a feat—or outrage, (according to the point of view). Everybody also knew that Larry Gregory's record for the year was very bad, and that this new trouble was likely to end his college career.

But the Dean mentioned no names. He finished by demanding that the guilty student should arise and apologize. "First, to the faculty member whose dignity he has damaged; secondly, to the

distinguished faculty as a whole, whom he has dishonored; and lastly, to the student body, whom he has shamed and disgraced."

A tense, uncomfortable silence awaited the confession. The students gazed at the faculty—seated on the platform—and the faculty gazed into space. But the ears of all were carefully attuned to catch any sounds that might arise from the southwest corner of the room. They came at last—the scraping of feet, the creaking of a seat. And all eyes suddenly turned in that direction—turned to behold little Roy Colter.

The situation was ludicrous, for Colter was one of the smallest men in college. The Dean, taking the place of the President during his absence, had feared that he would be called upon to expel the school's best athlete. But the confession of Colter—though believed by no one—presented a way out of the difficulty. On behalf of the faculty member therefore—on behalf of the faculty—and on behalf of the student body—the Dean accepted his apologies and suspended him for two weeks. And the young instructor gulped hard at his pride and went down in school history as the man who was tossed into a snow-drift by a student half his size.

Larry accepted the sacrifice of his friend as a matter of course. And that night the fellows drank once to the health of Roy Colter, and twenty times to Larry Gregory—"the greatest half-back in the state, hooray!" He had been saved for another season of gladiatorial glory, and college life resumed the even bass and tenor of its way.

At this point the picture enters the story. It hung in the friends' study room—where they smoked and plotted mischief. As far as the curriculum was concerned they studied as little as possible. But the picture furnished them a problem which they sought diligently to solve. They spent much time together over a chess-board, placing the men in the same positions that they occupied on the board in the painting.

One morning during the second week of his suspension Roy entered to find Larry bent over the board. "Come," said Larry, without looking up; "come and help me beat the Devil."

"Haven't time," grunted Roy, and turned again toward the door. But Larry sprang up and blocked the way. "Say, what's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You haven't time for anything any more. And what's this I hear about your shoveling snow and sweeping classrooms? If you're broke why don't you say so like a man?"

Roy mumbled something about "doing it on a bet," and tried to push Larry aside. But he was seized firmly by the shoulders and

ordered to "'fess up!" For a moment he hesitated, then took a letter from his pocket and handed it over. Larry released him and he left the room.

When Larry had read the letter he dropped into a chair. For a long time he sat there, his giant body bent forward, chin resting on knuckles. "Well, what do you think of that!" he said to himself. "The little cuss gets disowned by his uncle for saving my skin, and then starts in to work his own way without saying a word to me. What do you think of that!"

He raised his head, and his eyes rested on the painting. Then, as though seized with an inspiration, he sprang to his feet—six feet four of splendid, handsome, inglorious, misguided manhood. A little later the words "inglorious," "misguided," slunk back to their places in the dictionary. In that moment there was no room for them in the character of Larry Gregory. The light of a high resolve transformed his face.

"No you don't," he cried, and shook his fist at the painting. "You can't win, you can't win, you hideous, gloating Devil—not when Roy and Larry fight together!"

* * * * * *

Trouble was brewing at the plant of the Murdock Manufacturing Company, makers of nails. For five weeks the men had been on a strike, and there had been no lawlessness, no unseemly demonstrations of any kind. But the strain was becoming too great. Hunger and hopelessness were driving them forth from their homes in muttering groups.

That they had been thus far so orderly was due to the calm judgment and great personal influence of their leader. He was an idealist and a dreamer, endowed with common sense. His name was Colter.

Late in the afternoon of a November day he stood in the office of the company and pleaded for his men. Many times have the plaudits of multitudes greeted the words of orators less eloquent, spoken in a cause less worthy. But the Superintendent sat at his desk, impassive, unmoved.

"If I were merely a union leader, growing fat on money taken from the men, I couldn't hope for your consideration. But you know that I have worked with them. I have endured their long hours, suffered their hardships, and tried to live on the wages you pay them. Can't you see that their demands are just, that I am working only for them? Do you think I could see my own wife

grow sick with privation and worry—like the wives of these poor men—just to advance my own interests? My God, Larry—if you could only see things as they are!"

But the name was ill-chosen; for Lawrence Gregory, Superintendent of Mills, was not the Larry of old. He laughed—a harsh, unpleasant laugh; and there was a sneer in his voice as he said, "Great! You speak your piece well. But don't you think it was rather poor taste to mention the sufferings of your wife? You forget there was a time when she might have been my wife. And you know if she had married me she wouldn't be starving now.

"And about your fool strike—" he rose to emphasize his words—"my patience is exhausted. If the men don't return to work by noon to-morrow their places will be filled. Good day!"

Colter had reached the door when an impulse made him turn. "I'm going down to the lower gate," he said, "to tell the boys. They're good boys, but they'll be terribly disappointed—some of them may lose their heads—I—if I were you I wouldn't pass the lower gate to-night." The Superintendent laughed, the mocking laugh of a Goliath disdainful of a David's warning. David closed the door behind him, and Goliath was alone. A modern Goliath, strong in the strength of his selfish might, braving alone the armies of Labor, the powers of Right.

There seems to be in man's memory, a peculiar place set apart for the woman he loved who married another. As the Superintendent paced the floor of his office certain words of the strike leader rang in his ears. His thoughts went back to the time when they two had courted the same girl. And she was suffering now! He paused for a moment in his walk—but only for a moment. It wasn't his affair, anyway. Why had she married the other man—little, insignificant, impractical? She might have had him. But the ways of women—he expressed his thoughts by shaking his head. He himself had married a woman who didn't love him, but had helped him with money and influence.

His mind seemed strangely bent on reminiscence that night. And he looked back upon his life; lived over again the struggles that had led to success. He had risen high in the service of a great corporation, had shown himself zealous and fearless in hours of need. So that in this crisis, his iron hand held full authority. The minds, the souls of men—what did they mean to him? They were but pawns on the board where dollars were kings.

Thus he thought as he stood before the painting. Though it had been always before him, his ambition-blinded eyes had scarcely

beheld it in years. As he gazed upon the old familiar figures—the Devil still triumphant, the lad still hopeful—there came to him yet other memories. Memories of a time when the picture had hung in another room; when two friends had sought to prove the painter erred. O foolish wise man, to let thy thoughts thus stray to happy days! Are deeds of strength born of such moments of weakness?

He had almost forgotten the day, long ago, when, learning the cost of his friend's loyalty to him, he had vowed to be worthy that friendship. He had left college with a splendid record of eleventh hour achievement, and entered the world well equipped for its battles. He had won the victory for which he fought, and forgotten the man who had made the victory possible.

The blindness of years slipped from his eyes and he saw in the lad at the table his own image. He knew that the demands of his men, the pleadings of his friend, were just. On the other hand, his company had placed its trust in him. What could he do? He was checkmated!

Little by little, as he gazed upon the painting its old spell came over him again; and he became lost in a study of the men on the board, as he had done many times in his school-days. "Black Wins," he mused; "black wins"—and then suddenly there came to him the solution for which he had so long sought in vain. "It's a lie," he shouted—"a lie! White wins!" He had figured a play by which the boy could not only escape the Devil's checkmate, but also win the game. And his triumphant words referred to more than a game of chess.

The private secretary, hearing the cry, entered to inquire if he was wanted. And Gregory sent him out with two telegrams, both bearing the same message; one addressed to the president of the company, the other to a man powerful, crafty, much hated—the head of an army of strike-breakers:

"Demands of men granted; strike settled."

The Superintendent threw on his hat and coat, and left the building. The early twilight of November was growing into night, the air was cool and sharp. He turned toward the lower gate, and whistled as he strode down the street. He was going to his friend with a glad message—he would right the wrongs that he had done.

In the distance he could see a dark mass, wide and deep, gathered about the whitewashed wall. On the frosty air there came to his ears the voice of Colter addressing the men. He knew the little man was trying, even in this last extremity, to pacify, to comfort, the turbulent spirits that had borne so much. He quickened his

pace—he was almost there—he could hear the speaker's words.

But a man on the outskirts of the crowd had heard that happy whistle; he had turned, and recognized the giant figure swinging forward through the dusk. The lips of joy blow discordant notes on ears attuned to bitterness. As the man turned he tripped upon a brick; and when he rose to his feet it lay concealed upon his breast. The good Lord meant bricks to be used for buildings and pavements. But they have sharp edges, they are hard—sharp and hard and merciless like the perverted passions of men.

Gregory called to Colter; he heard and ceased speaking. And then there came a crash—the sound of someone falling. Little Colter jumped from the stand whereon he stood; jumped far out into that sea of men, and tore his way, with fists and feet and frantic oaths, till he came to Larry.

He loosed the choking collar, and pillowed the bleeding head. And when he had done all he could—when the gong of the ambulance announced the coming of aid—his tears dropped fast on the still face of his friend.

"O Larry," he moaned; "Larry—Larry—!"

The blue eyes opened wide, they saw and understood. And a smile, the smile indescribable of a strong man who loves, shone on his face. "Roy," he whispered; "Roy—good old Roy!" The eyes closed again, but opened for an instant. And Roy bent low to hear the words, faint—very faint—but fervent, triumphant, joyous:

"White wins!"

The Quadrangle.*

BY BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

AT the club Meldrum was always called the Sphinx —behind his back. To his face he was always Meldrum. No one ever dreamed of calling him John. "Jack" would have been looked on as a *casus belli*.

The Sphinx he was to everyone who knew him. Still, there was a division as to the connotation of the word. A few there were who admitted that in their minds he always conjured up before them a papier maché Sphinx. But the majority, who believed him to be nothing short of a genius, laughed and said to any doubter, "Ah, you do not know John Meldrum." And nobody did.

He was a silent, meditative man, with cold grey eyes, sensuous lips, a bull-dog chin, ears that were delicate and small, and a mouth that always seemed on the point of breaking into a smile. He was a giant in stature; his hair was curly; he had fingers like a pianist's —long, tapering, prehensile. He was worth a million or two or three, and never smoked nor drank. In business he was cold, hard and dry, a "frozen proposition," in the jargon of the street. Shelley's poems were always in his desk. It was said also that he carried in his pocket a copy of the "Imitation." He knew Cellini from beginning to end. He admitted to forty-eight, but trimmed a Christmas tree in one of his little charities—a sanitarium for crippled children—with the zest and buoyancy of a boy of twelve.

The Meldrums, at times, entertained lavishly. Mrs. Meldrum was considerably younger than her husband—just thirty, some said. Tall, dark, svelte, quick of movement, low of voice, Beatrice Meldrum was considered a beauty. At least among men. Women admired her for her exquisite gowns.

"As happy as the Meldrums," was a little saying in the circles in which they moved, and their house on Riverside Drive was the Mecca of many troubled souls who aired their nothings to two imperturbable but sympathetic listeners. There were no children,

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but there was a third member of the household, Tom, the bull-terrier. He belonged to Meldrum and was his almost constant companion when alone.

"Whom is Meldrum talking to in the dining room?" Arthur Bennington, an old visitor to the house, asked Mrs. Meldrum one day.

"Oh," she laughed, "that's John talking to Tom. You know he has queer ideas on the subject of animals—especially dogs. He says that after they have lived with one person for a number of years they can understand everything that is said to them. And he pretends that Tom talks back to him in signs and barks."

"Curious, but not an absurd theory," remarked Bennington.

"Very curious, and a little uncanny I think," replied Mrs. Meldrum, who turned nervously in her chair. Bennington flicked a hair off his sleeve and looked toward the dining room.

Arthur Bennington was blue-eyed and curly-haired; stood six feet, three inches, in his bare feet, and was just turning the corner of thirty-five. In the clubs and cafés he was known as a "good fellow"—that is, a man who buys two drinks to another "good fellow's" one. He frequently got drunk, could talk lingerie for an hour, was an all-around athlete, and five years before he knew anything about life he had written a sensational best seller. Happily for the reading public, an uncle died shortly after the book went into its fiftieth thousand. Bennington inherited about a million. He foreswore the Muse, and became the most charming idler in his set. He had a pretty instinct for the wives of other men. The women liked him, and if it was sometimes whispered that his relations were not always according to the divine Plato, it was averred in extenuation that he was no Paolo.

Bennington and Beatrice Meldrum had known each other about a year. They were seen together in public quite often but Discretion itself never hid under more veils than the actions of this charming pair. And then Meldrum always "happened in" at the right moment. He had the air of a curious looker-on at the open-air sports of Bennington and his wife. Did Meldrum love his wife? Only Beatrice could have replied to that. Meldrum himself would have been at a loss to say. It was, anyhow, a matter that concerned only themselves. It would be improper for us to look into the matter further.

As Meldrum came from the dining room, he extended his hand to Bennington in the usual cordial manner. Tom sniffed at the feet of Bennington, stood off two or three paces and looked at

him ironically and knowingly. He did this regularly when he met Bennington, rejecting the latter's proffered pat by a polite and seemingly unconscious retreat. Mrs. Meldrum seldom got very far, either, with Tom. At most, he would lick her hand and then squat on the floor.

"Can you really talk with Tom, Meldrum?" asked Bennington, pursing his lips sceptically. At the mention of his name, Tom pricked up his ears.

"Well," laughed Meldrum, "I have a theory that I can. Dogs, like monkeys, have a language, and why shouldn't we learn it?"

"How far have you and Tom progressed?" asked Bennington, with just the shade of a sneer in his tone, which Meldrum did not catch, or, if he did, his face did not show it. Tom's eyes, however, shaded to a deep green. Beatrice looked curiously and negligently at all three.

There was a metallic ring in Meldrum's voice as he said, ambiguously enough:

"Why, we'll soon be on speaking terms."

Tom's eyes resumed their normally stupid deep gray.

Bennington blew some rings into the air from his perfecto and stared at a small Whistler over the mantel. Beatrice gently rubbed one shoe against the other. After a minute of this insufferable boredom Bennington proposed supper at the Waldorf and afterwards the theatre.

Meldrum said he didn't care about it, but he would join them after the theatre, at Rector's.

After Bennington and Mrs. Meldrum left the house Meldrum and Tom went into the library. Meldrum threw himself into a large reclining chair under the lamp, and Tom sat on his haunches in the shadow. One would have said Pluto and Cerberus. Hour after hour ticked away and Meldrum never moved. His face was lifeless, expressionless. His eyes were problems in moods. Was the Sphinx playing with a chimera or was it squeezing a rat in its paw?

Ten o'clock struck. Ah, yes, the supper at Rector's; he remembered. He looked at Tom who now lay stretched on the floor, one eye closed, one eye on his master.

"Tom, watch, watch, watch," he said solemnly, to the dog. He took from the table a picture of Beatrice and Bennington, and holding them close together before the eyes of Tom, repeated in a voice that had the muffled implacability of the measured fall of a sledge-hammer on a block of lead:

"Watch, watch, watch!"

Meldrum's eyes sank into Tom's eyes like fangs. The dog seemed to have stopped breathing. He was rigid, will-less. The word "watch" fell again and again from Meldrum's lips, while he continued to hold the two pictures in front of the dog's eyes which had a strange, wild, human sparkle. The spell broken, Tom ran distractedly around the room two or three times then lay down panting at his master's feet.

Meldrum spent a great many of his evenings at the club, and usually Tom was left at home. Bennington came to the house as usual, but so did the Meldrums' other friends. Everything went along swimmingly—except for the fact—almost negligible in itself—that of late Meldrum chewed his perfectos instead of smoking them.

One evening, while the Meldrums were giving a dinner at home, they heard a great uproar in the library. Tom was known, in a general way, to be in that part of the house.

"Tom's got a burglar!" screamed Mrs. Meldrum.

"Be careful, Meldrum, don't go in without your gun," admonished Bennington.

The company had risen, their faces a mixture of fright and pleasurable expectation. The rumpus had suddenly stopped. With Meldrum leading, pistol in hand, they all pushed and craned toward the library, which Meldrum had left well lighted.

Opening the door cautiously and peering in, a somewhat ridiculous sight met the eye. Tom was squatted on his haunches on the chair next to the table breathing heavily. His lips were bleeding. The table, chair and floor were littered with glass, bits of cardboard and sections of picture frames.

Tom had destroyed, chewed, bitten, the pictures of Mrs. Meldrum and Bennington, and, incidentally, had smashed the lamp.

"Why, Tom's had a fit, I believe!" exclaimed Bennington, standing at a safe distance, however, from the bull-terrier. A tremor passed over the body of Beatrice. She rang for the maid, and had the mess cleaned up. The guests were greatly disappointed. No burglar; only the antics of a dog! Bah! Tom was marched to the rear to be patched up.

Meldrum smiled a queer smile and remarked, "Dogs will be dogs," an aphorism of such brilliancy and elasticity that it was remembered at the table for an hour after.

The Meldrums always spent the month of June at Atlantic City. They installed themselves with Tom in one of the large hotels overlooking the ocean, and dawdled their days away with the help of

Bennington and some others. Bennington spent most of his afternoons in the ocean, and being an expert swimmer he had the expert swimmer's mania for doing the things that he should not do.

One afternoon, quite late, the Meldrums and Tom sat on the end of a pier looking at Bennington swimming around. The pier was remote and quite deserted at this hour. The one life guard stationed at the spot had gone in, and the beach was lifeless. The monotonous music from a far-away *carrousel* fell on the ear, making itself heard above the dreary splash and boom of the waves against the old wooden supports of the pier. The waters, of an ashy gray, had swallowed up the sun, and a quarter-moon, like a golden shell, caught the vision of Meldrum.

He smoked and chewed the eternal perfecto, while Beatrice watched dreamily the form of Bennington.

Suddenly there arose a muffled cry for help and Bennington was seen to sink. Beatrice sprang to her feet.

"My God! Arthur has a cramp! Tom! Tom! Tom!" she grasped the dog wildly and pointed to the spot where Bennington had thrown up his hands.

Tom and Meldrum were studies in bronze and marble. They looked into each other's eyes, the dog waiting for the signal from his master. Meldrum made no motion. His face was rigid; his cheeks seemed swollen.

The dog made no move when Beatrice grasped him. She released her hold, and sprang back from both of them. Her face was the face of a Fury. Her mind had grasped all in a flash.

"Murderers! Murderers! Murderers!" she screamed. She hurled herself at Meldrum with the force of a cannon ball; but before she could reach him, Tom, as if released from a spell, sprang at her throat, and both woman and dog went over the low wooden railing into the sea, the dog's fangs deep in the throat of the woman, the woman's fingers deep in the throat of the dog. The sea swallowed them up without a sound.

Meldrum rose from the bench, looked into the waters, threw his cigar away, and stood rigid but outwardly calm, in the dark.

"I will have to notify the coroner, I suppose," he murmured. And he strolled leisurely up the pier.

Chakiton — First Stop.*

BY IDA M. EVANS.

IF there had been any one else to send, it is likely that Jack Marley would still be carrying untrimmed shapes from the reserve stock to the display counters. Marley was twenty, and had graduated from the Lake View High School only two years before Jim McWayth found appendicitis, gastric indigestion, and a panicky heart all in one day out in Iowa, and had to be brought back on a stretcher to Chicago.

But there was no one else to send. So old Johnson who secretly liked Marley's pleasant assured way of saying good-morning, told McWayth that he would let the boy go out to Chakiton, pick up the sample trunks and complete the trip.

McWayth had sold millinery in Southern Iowa for as many years —and the years were not few—as the Bon Ton Millinery Company had been in existence.

On a white iron bed, in a white-walled room, he sent the nurse out of the room that he might use the proper language in wailing about his orphaned territory and the clumsy handling it would get from its young foster father.

"I'll try him on a few towns only," soothed Johnson. "He can't do much damage in Chakiton, because it's never yielded a big order yet."

"No," agreed McWayth, and in spite of his intestinal agony, he grinned. "All I ever sold to were the Burton sisters. Old Henderson and Bernstein would turn away customers before they would let a road salesman stock them up. Be sure and tell the young un to call on them. It'll be a liberal education for him."

Now, what Jack Marley knew about life, he had learned not more than one scant yard from his widowed mother's decorous apron strings. When old Johnson called him into the glittering glass cage that harbored the presidential dignity of the Bon Ton Company, he went in fear and trembling. He couldn't imagine what the old man wanted—unless a profane roast was coming because the day before

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Marley had dumped a box of cotton marigolds in an order where only silk poppies were supposed to bloom.

Instead, the old man greeted him with a genial smile that was like an electric shock, it popped so unexpectedly from his withered face, and told him that No. 12 of the Burlington would drop him in Chakiton the next morning. He cautioned him against losing any of the customers that McWayth had gathered like lambs into the Bon Ton fold.

Marley's eyes filled with grateful tears, and his face—that had been on speaking terms with a razor only eighteen months—turned pink.

He packed a suitcase as well as he could with trembling fingers, kissed his admiring mother good-by, and stepped on the train with much the same tumult of emotion that Caesar stepped over the Alps.

In Chakiton, he pridefully joined the parade of suitcases that stalked from the depot to the red-brick, two-story hotel. After he had spent two long delicious hours arranging his flowers and braids, he went forth to call upon the trade.

He struck Mrs. Henderson's shop first. It was nearest the hotel. Three doors beyond was Bernstein's Elite Parlors. Half a block farther, the Burton sisters had their Emporium.

Had old Mrs. Henderson been in her shop that morning, Marley would have experienced a volley of language beside which old Johnson's most virulent effort would have seemed a schoolboy's falter. Mrs. Henderson bought her spring goods in August—job lots and such, that she disposed of the following April as though they were just unpacked. Her fall stock she bought in December—when wholesale houses were throwing them away. And when a woman can buy that way and sell at the same top-notch prices as her competitors who buy at respectable times, no mere man has any chance with her in a talking bout. A sixty-horse power machine and a twelve-inch cable couldn't have dragged McWayth into her shop.

If she had been in, she would have told Marley what she thought of disreputable drummers in general and him in particular. Then she would have turned a hose of abuse on wholesale houses as a class, and the Bon Ton as an individual. By the time she had worked from the villainy of wholesalers to the trickery of her competitors in Chakiton, Marley would have been on a dead run up Main Street. Then, with a chastened air, he would have slunk into the next store.

Bernstein would have snubbed him cruelly, because Bernstein loathed courteous chastened beginners more than he loathed cab-

bage roses when every Easter hat begged loudly for sweet peas.

On that March morning, it happened that old Mrs. Henderson was not in her shop. She was at home, her feet in a bucket of hot mustard water, her aching head wrapped in red flannel.

Stella Mayle was tending store. Stella was seventeen. Not a rose in Marley's choice imported collection was so pink and white and prettily curved as her cheeks and chin. And not one of his most expensive French violets came within a hundred miles of rivaling the dark purple-blue of her eyes.

After eighteen months in a wholesale house, Marley was not altogether ignorant of the fact that the world holds many pink-cheeked girls. But to date this was the only one in millinery circles who did not crush him with a haughty stare or call him "sonny." He was convinced at once that Iowa excelled in the production of something besides corn.

Stella had left high school less than a year before. Simultaneously with a superficial knowledge of algebra and the genitive case, she had learned—and taken a post-graduate course under Mrs. Henderson—that all traveling salesmen are roués, drunkards and wife-abandoners.

This was her first face-to-face, speaking experience with the wicked tribe. Always before, she sewed bandeaux demurely in the rear room while Mrs. Henderson shooed them out the front door.

Being able to trace her lineage straight back to Eve, Stella ached for tangibility. So, after chiffons had been discussed, the weather condemned, and the condition of trade talked about as seriously as though both knew what they were saying, she asked Marley, in properly rebukeful tones, if he didn't get tired of drinking and gambling all the time.

Marley's eyes rounded and he began a hot denial. He began it but he choked it off before it reached the air. For the tone, though rebukeful and stern with missionary zeal, was not altogether devoid of admiration. And the look in the girl's eyes reminded him, although he didn't stop to analyze it, of the look in a small boy's eyes when he watches the most daring bareback rider at the circus.

He knew that McWayth, when home in Chicago, went regularly to Sunday school, and that Deering, who had Illinois, was a prohibitionist. All the same, if commercial standing, to be a standing, required a veneer of wickedness, Marley was ready for the veneer.

"Awfully tired," he answered. His voice was bored and drawly. "But," plaintively, "what's a fellow to do? Jumping from one

town to another, not knowing a soul, no one to talk to but hotel clerks and conductors and porters and customers and other salesmen. And no one to care if a fellow's sick—or blue—"

"I suppose," said Stella pityingly, "that you *do* have some excuse!"

"Oh, it isn't what you call *excuse*," he corrected gently. "But when a fellow spends evening after evening alone—" And then, quite irrelevantly, he added, "What are you going to do this evening?"

Stella's pink cheeks grew five shades pinker. "Oh—my father wouldn't allow—" Then she bit her tongue, and the five shades were increased by ten.

Marley sighed. "A hotel isn't a homelike place," gloomily.

"No," she agreed dolefully. "And I suppose that you are so lonely that you can't resist gambling!"

Up to that moment of his commercial career, Marley's gambling experience had consisted of two cigars won and a nickel lost. His sigh testified to at least five thousand dollars. Five minutes more, and he would have confessed to three wives and an uncontrollable thirst for rye straight. But he was headed off by the entrance of two elderly women in ancient black. They brought their last year hats wrapped in newspapers, and Marley soon knew that they were prepared to spend two hours in talk of style.

He left reluctantly, and sauntered into Bernstein's Elite Parlors, so inflated by knowledge of his wickedness that he forgot to be diffident. Now Bernstein never gave a salesman an order, never talked to salesmen, never looked at salesmen. He bought only in Chicago and New York. And although he did not depend altogether on last year's job lots, he was as well known for sharp tricks and haggling as Mrs. Henderson. He had never given the Bon Ton Company an order—considered the firm's prices monstrous.

But Bernstein was standing in his door when Marley entered Mrs. Henderson's shop. He spotted a new man and waited, grinning, to see him jump out. Bernstein didn't know that Mrs. Henderson was sick at home.

When the minutes passed and the new man didn't appear, Bernstein wondered. With each minute, his wonder grew. Never before in the history of the retail trade had any salesman staid in that shop over fifty consecutive seconds. Marley staid forty minutes. Bernstein watched and timed him—and grew very thoughtful. Was it possible that the Bon Ton was putting out a low-priced line—or cutting prices before Easter?

Marley's sauntering entrance and absorption—he was thinking of Stella's complexion—passed for travel-weary salesmanship. To the careless invitation to come to the hotel and look over the line, Bernstein instantly assented. He would be there at two o'clock sharp.

After Marley had got from the Burton sisters the small order that had been waiting since McWayth sought the stretcher, he strolled back for dinner. In Chakiton dinner is at twelve-thirty.

Marley had always lived at home—which was very pleasant but monotonous. The prospect of eating in a big alien dining room. taking his choice of under-done mutton, fat pork chops and over-done beef, and drinking grayish-black coffee, filled him with absolute delight. There were five other salesmen at the table. He listened rapturously while they discussed shoes, cutglass, flat ware, triple plate, the rise in silver on account of the upheaval in China, the sassy ways of some customers, the cotton crop, and the only two hotels in the state that served a decent steak. And his youth and enthusiasm may be estimated from the fact that he never knew the languid waitress brought him liver and bacon instead of the ordered rare roast beef.

While he lounged in the sample room, waiting for Bernstein, a spray of pink roses, a masterpiece of artistic artificiality, suggested an excuse for returning to Mrs. Henderson's shop. Within ten seconds, a boy was taking it over, with a note to the effect that Marley would drop in later, and get her opinion of it. The house always liked to know how the novelties appealed to customers, etc., etc.

As the boy went out, Bernstein came in. After a careful, critical inspection of the line, he snorted. No bargains there. He pawed the straw shapes with violent hands. Same old line that he had refused to buy in Chicago six weeks before. Same old prices. His wrath boiled. He had been lured with false pretenses.

"Lot of nerve you got!" he chortled, "bringing me down to look at this junk—"

Before he could finish the sentence, the door bounced open. A small shabby old woman, with eyes like little black needles, bounced in. From one hand dangled the pink spray. How was Marley, ignorant amateur that he was, to know that only death or total paralysis could keep Mrs. Henderson away from her shop in the afternoon. Mornings were not so important. Most lady Chakitonites were busy with housework in the morning. But the afternoons were sacred to millinery.

Marley deduced the lady's identity from her possession of the wreath. Fatuously he assumed that she wanted more.

"Ah! Mrs. Henderson," he smiled, "did you finally get down?"

Mrs. Henderson had spurted over the three blocks that lay between her shop and the hotel at a gait all out of proportion to her age and lung-capacity. She intended to fling the spray straight in the face of the presumptuous person who had sent it, and warn him to keep away from any girl employed in her shop. She had to wait a moment to get her breath.

And in that moment, Bernstein edged up, pricked up his ears—also his nose and eyes. He hadn't thought much of that spray—maybe the line was better value than he had supposed. Never before had he distrusted his own judgment. But there was no denying that the shabby old woman in rusty black was a wise old buyer.

"I'm looking at this line," he said sternly. "Just wait your turn, Mrs. Henderson."

"What!" shrieked Mrs. Henderson. And then *her* eyes and ears took a new angle of observation. If Bernstein—*Bernstein*—who loathed all road salesmen—and especially young road salesmen—if he thought the line worth looking at, the Bon Ton Company must be selling at unheard of prices.

She forgot the spray and her wrath. The preceding August job lots had been scarce. This spring her stock was low, and she had been debating whether to buy now at the ruinous prices of early season or lose part of her trade by not having sufficient stock. Several customers had balked at waiting until July for an Easter hat merely that she might make more profit.

"I'm here!" she announced defiantly. "And while I'm here, I look at this line. And I don't care about buying before any rubbernecks!"

"Aw! I was here first!" Bernstein objected angrily. "And I'm in a hurry! This ain't fair business!"

"You're using words you don't know the meaning of," said Mrs. Henderson, tearing a bit of foliage to see if it was made of paper."

"I was here first:" Bernstein appealed to Marley.

Bernstein had no Stella in his shop. "*Ladies* first!" came suavely from Marley.

"Ladies! Bah-h-h!"

"Ha! Ha!" croaked old Mrs. Henderson in triumph. Among

all the objects of her detestation, Bernstein stood at the head of the line. He stole her ideas, her trimmers, her customers. Worse than all that, he was threatening to buy the building she occupied and raise her rent.

"Set your feet t'other side of that door," she ordered.

Furious but helpless, Bernstein set his feet as she desired.

Then she bought. She blinked at the prices until her scanty lashes almost fell off. "Nary a cent will I make," she groaned. But of course prices were high at the beginning of the season—and Bernstein's judgment was good. If the line wasn't the best and lowest out—why, Bernstein wouldn't be buying it. And when she had made the plunge, she wanted the benefit as soon as possible. Marley had duplicate samples of part of the line and could deliver several articles that day.

Bernstein must have loitered in the corridor. As she tripped out, he rushed in.

"That was a low dirty trick," he snarled. "Turning me down—"

"Forget it!" Marley airily advised him, and rapidly sorted the duplicates that he could spare for immediate delivery. He was hoping that he would find opportunity, when he took them to the shop, to persuade Stella to persuade her father that a lonely young man would get into all sorts of trouble in a lonely hotel,—trouble that he would elude if he could spend the evening with a nice girl. And so he did not really care to waste time with Bernstein even for an order. One could get orders in any town.

Bernstein was petrified. Divers salesmen had used many tones to him—polite, servile, entreating, arguing, beseeching, whining—but never had his ears been assailed by the insolent unconcern of that "Forget it!"

"Maybe you got no time to wait on me!" he sneered.

"Not very much," candidly. "Unless you look about darned quick and tell me in a jiffy what you want."

On a trunk lay Mrs. Henderson's order—face up. Bernstein sneaked a look at it, walked past it, read it, scowled over it. The prices were not low. They were high—Bon Ton prices always were high. Nevertheless, there was one indisputable fact—old Mrs. Henderson had never been known to get stung. There must be some value in the goods that his less sure eyes couldn't locate.

Marley had the box ready to take to Mrs. Henderson. He looked impatiently at the dilatory Bernstein.

"Come on," he said finally. "There's no use spending all day on one little bum order!"

Bernstein shook a virulent fist at the order on the trunk. "Double that!" he commanded. "And, say, I'll write into the firm to send some one out that's got time to wait on me!"

Which he did. But Marley's daily report got there first. And after that shock, neither Johnson nor McWayth would have been stunned by the news that Iowa had gone democratic.

"How," McWayth feebly asked Marley six weeks later, "did you make such a hit in Chakiton?"

"I guess I haven't made it yet," Marley confessed morosely. "But she says that maybe after a while, she'll let me write to her."

Which was as close as McWayth ever got to the bottom of the mystery.